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The per capita student circulation of books in the Bennington College Library is 80.9.



Conferences with the Librarian are a part of preparing senior theses.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE BULLETIN

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THE BENNINGTON COLLEGE BULLETIN is issued quarterly throughout each year. The College does not issue an inclusive catalogue. The general plan for issuing bulletins is:

September—Announcement for the Year
December—Information of general or special interest
March—Announcement of The Bennington School of the Arts
June—News of Faculty and Graduates

Supplements and additional bulletins are issued as occasion demands. The College is glad to add to its mailing list for bulletins the name of anyone interested or to send single bulletins upon request.

Correspondence regarding particular aspects of the College should be addressed to the following:

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MISS DORIS FORESMAN, *Director*

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

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BENNINGTON SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

MISS JOSEPHINE SHELLY, *Administrative Director*

Visitors to the College are welcome, and student guides are available. The offices of the College are closed from Saturday noon until Monday morning. Members of the faculty and staff are not available for interview during this time except by special appointment in advance.

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Dec. Mar. 19, 1942

THE LIBRARY AT BENNINGTON

The Central position of the library in the scheme of any institution of higher learning is evident. The Bennington College Library is now in its tenth year. Each fall the Librarian has submitted a report on progress to the President and faculty; it seems wise at this time to examine the library, its accomplishments, advantages and limitations, and to present a more general report in the form of this bulletin.

A Student wants to find the speeches of President Roosevelt; another would like pictorial material to use in planning production for the first American comedy, *The Contrast*. A third is seeking information on the clinical use of sulfapyridine; a literature major is anxious to discover criticisms of Henry James.

The College librarian is accustomed to receive requests as diverse as these, sometimes all in one hour, and she must be ready to deal with them. In addition to requests from students for texts and books of reference in a wide variety of fields of study, members of the faculty ask for specialized material for their own research. Administrative officers and committees want data for use at their meetings. The demand for fiction for general reading is always present. In a college like Bennington, with a small community of about 270 students, and 50 faculty, how completely can the library hope to supply the needs of the community?

Obviously the primary function of an undergraduate college library is to make available to students the materials necessary for their class and individual work. The educational program of Bennington College aims to be sufficiently broad and resourceful to produce in students a sense of their place in the development of modern western culture.

The library must also be flexible. As needs change from year to year, according to new emphases or new courses in the curriculum, the library must be able to supply the books and periodicals necessary to an expanding and shifting program. This implies that the collection be kept functional, with as little dead weight as possible.

In a small college the library has no intention of competing with the specialized collections of large libraries.

To keep the working collection most useful the library cooperates with the faculty in planning the books to be used and the list of periodicals, newspapers and pamphlets to be ordered. The administrative and educational functions of the library must be balanced. A library should be administered smoothly, for unless the details of operation are carried out accurately and promptly, the educational efficiency is cut down. But in order to further by means of its administration the instructional program of the College, the library must be constantly aware of the special projects upon which students are working; it must maintain close relations with members of the faculty in order to ascertain student needs; it should be in advance, if possible, of curriculum trends. The most satisfactory method of selecting and maintaining the collection has been found to involve frequent consultation between members of the faculty and library staff.

In its organization the library intent is to make books accessible and to keep them so. An open shelf system is in operation and easy availability is stressed. Students are trained in effective use of the library. The library tries to help them become acquainted with the resources of the collection, both in relation to specific problems and for more general reading. At the same time it attempts to further the College effort to develop self-dependence and initiative in the student, by providing opportunity for her to act on her own responsibility in her use of library books. These policies are implemented by the physical set-up of the library as well as by the mechanics of its arrangement.

What kind of organization is needed for these purposes? More specifically, how did Bennington College go about creating its library?

Bennington College was opened to its first class of students in September, 1932. It was completely new; administration, faculty, staff, students, curriculum, buildings. The College librarian was afforded a singular opportunity, without the encumbrances of dusty and dated books, rigid rules, set methods and preconceived ideas.

That the Bennington College library was intended to be an integral part of the educational system was early emphasized. The history of the library parallels that of the College. Mrs. Gladys Young Leslie was called from the New York Public Library to become librarian a year before the College opened, at the same time that the other major administrative appointments were made. Faculty appointments followed, so that from the start the librarian was able to work in close cooperation with members of the faculty. This made possible immediate discussion and coordinated planning between the instructional staff and the operating staff. That the library should follow the bent of the curriculum was thus not only essential but also immediately feasible.

The library was extremely fortunate in having at the outset a grant of \$25,000, made by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, for the purchase of books. This permitted the acquisition of any absolutely necessary volumes and in addition many other valuable ones which a small college library, operating under a correspondingly small budget, might not have been able to afford. The Carnegie Corporation grant was made with the understanding that individual, not duplicate, titles were to be purchased. As there were no additional funds available for book purchases during the first few years, an excellent opportunity was provided to test the theory that duplicate titles (in a small college with small classes) are the least important items for such a library to acquire. This aided the formulation of a policy which has since been proved very valuable. Some duplicates are secured, sometimes by gift, sometimes by purchase, but it has been found desirable to avoid extensive duplicate buying. Two copies of any book have so far been sufficient. However, different editions of such authors as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Chaucer, may be necessities.

The first four months of 1932 were spent working on plans and equipment for the library, getting in touch with members of the faculty as they were appointed, and beginning to order recommended

books, reference books, and other titles certain to be needed for general use. According to the original pre-depression plans for the College the library was to have been installed in an imposing brick structure designed solely for that purpose. The revision of plans dictated by necessary economies resulted in the use of a portion of the Barn, a commodious building formerly used as stables. It was sufficiently large to permit rearrangement into conference and class rooms, science laboratories, and administrative offices as well as the library. Revised plans for the library provided for an informal reading room with high raftered ceiling and alcoves formed by book shelves, plus a small office for the librarian and a small potential stack room at first utilized as a work room.

These quarters were not ready for occupancy as early in the year as had been hoped and a sitting-room in Cricket Hill, a farm-house on the campus, temporarily became the librarian's office. This was not an arrangement conducive to the accomplishment of a maximum amount of work; in cold weather the temperature of the room frequently dropped to below the freezing point. The furniture, which had been loaned, consisted of a few early American pieces: a librarian's desk with a high sloping top full of wormholes, a highboy used as a filing cabinet, a very narrow horsehair sofa, and some unsteady chairs. As shelves were not available, books, as they arrived, were put into boxes on the floor or into various closets; when this space was exhausted the pantry took the overflow, and books, jellies and jams sat side by side for several weeks.

In May, 1932, it was possible to move into the Barn, and from this time on work progressed rapidly. Lists of recommendations from faculty came in, books began to arrive in great numbers, the list of periodical subscriptions was made up and ordered, cataloguing was started and the library began to take shape. The reading room shelving was installed in June, and between that time and the opening of College on September 6, about 2,500 volumes were catalogued and prepared for the use of the first class of 86 students.

During the first College year many additional requests for book purchases were received from members of the faculty and many titles were added. It was both necessary and desirable to secure for the library collection at the outset the books which individual members of the faculty were certain to want at once. Any indulgence in

speculation as to what might be needed at some future time could not be allowed. Members of the faculty were asked to submit lists of books they were planning to have students use; if these lists were not comprehensive, the deficiencies soon became apparent. If, in the judgment of the librarian, the lists appeared to be too long, she retained the right of veto. Student requests were carefully noted and taken care of as demand arose. Supplementary material was acquired as needed.

At the close of the first year the number of volumes in the College library was approximately 5,600; at the close of the second year the library contained over 8,300 volumes. During succeeding years from 1,500 to 2,500 volumes were added annually; at the present time the collection contains over 21,000 volumes. In the third year of the College the stack room became a reality and additional working space was provided for the library staff. Again, as the collection grew, further enlargement became necessary, and the stack room was doubled in size. It is expected that the actual physical needs for the housing of books can be taken care of until 1946. The original staff of two persons has now become four, all of whom have had professional training. In addition, four or five student assistants are given training and employment each year in order to relieve the regular staff of some details. This employment of students is also of educational value in teaching them the details of library routine and in affording experience in working in a responsible position.

The very great advantage of university and large college libraries in the matter of extensive book collections is one which a small college library must forego. To offset this, there is for the Bennington student the pleasure of using an easily accessible collection, a collection which, if carefully selected (and weeded, as time progresses), presents a live assortment to those who wish to examine material in special fields. Books are classified by subject, and each subject occupies one or more of the alcoves formed by the shelves. In every alcove a reading table and several chairs afford easy and comfortable working space for students using the books. The interrelation of all fields of knowledge is emphasized by the absence of departmental libraries and the grouping of all material in a single building. A student of any period has quickly at hand subject matter on all phases of that period, for example, one interested in eighteenth century

America can easily find cross sections of material variously classified as history, painting, sculpture, literature, science, philosophy, education, music, theatre, government, economics, religion.

A small selective collection has even some advantages over a large one. For the average undergraduate the large collection presents a mental hazard which discourages, rather than encourages, reading and the use of books because of the inaccessibility of material of interest to the student and the superfluity of material which she cannot assimilate.

Does the plan for this library work? Do the students read?

The Circulation figures show that they do read. Some libraries attempt to record the use of books by counting the readers in the library at various times; this method cannot disclose significant figures about a library having the open shelf system. Another method is to keep a record of overnight loans of reserve books and the circulation of books on regular two-week loans. Since obviously not much reading can be done between the hour of the library's closing at night and the hour of opening in the morning, figures for two-week loans give a better indication of the amount of reading done.

The method for determining the amount of reading done at Bennington is that of counting the volumes issued on two-week loans during the College year. The total circulation has risen from 19,740 in 1934-1935 (the first year with a full student body) to 28,142 in 1940-1941.

Total Yearly Circulation

1934-1941

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Circulation Including Summer School</i>	<i>Total Circulation Other than Students</i>
1934-1935.....	19,740	2,207
1935-1936.....	22,412	2,917
1936-1937.....	22,788	3,277
1937-1938.....	23,604	3,542
1938-1939.....	23,462	3,605
1939-1940.....	24,577	4,171
1940-1941.....	28,142	5,662

The per capita student circulation for books borrowed for two weeks rose from 58.5 in 1934-1935 to 70.8 in 1940-1941. In comparison with the figures for the average college student circulation these figures are high. The general college average of student circulation is about 12 volumes a year per student from the general collection and 50 to 60 charges with about half that number of titles from the reserved book collection. These figures are based on books secured under closed shelf conditions. The Bennington figures are reversed for general circulation and reserves. "Estimating simply on the basis of titles used, the Bennington figures are about

55% higher than the general average . . ."¹ It must also be noted that there are practically no examinations at Bennington, and that there is, besides the long individual projects, an increasing emphasis on term papers and frequent reports and short projects. Including reserve books the present per capita student circulation at Bennington is now 80.9.

Per Capita Circulation of Books to Students

1934-1941

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Two-Week Loans</i>	<i>Reserved for Overnight Use</i>
1934-1935.....	73.1	58.5	14.6
1935-1936.....	71.8	58.5	13.3
1936-1937.....	73.2	60.8	12.4
1937-1938.....	72.2	58.4	13.7
1938-1939.....	69.5	57.4	12.
1939-1940.....	74.	65.4	8.5
1940-1941.....	80.9	70.8	10.1

These figures do indicate that Bennington students read. They show that the cooperative planning between the faculty and the library is effective, that the faculty is leading the students to make use of the materials available, and that the library is successful in providing facilities for carrying out the educational program, and in encouraging general reading in the community.

The responsibility for the encouragement of reading rests jointly upon the faculty and the library. The successful use of the library results from the cooperation of faculty and staff and students. Students are encouraged to ask for assistance whenever it is needed. It has been found, for example, that it is desirable to wait until there is definite need to use such library tools as the New York Times Index, Public Affairs Information Service, the Congressional Record, before giving actual instruction in their use. The impetus to work with such material comes for the most part from the instructor by way of assignments and projects; the library must be ready to follow up. Individual attention is given as required, and members

¹ Harvie Branscomb, *Teaching with Books*, p. 73.

of the faculty are urged to encourage their students to consult members of the library staff about their problems.

The student's first acquaintance with the library is made during the registration period. Various methods of introducing her to the library have been tried; during the first few years students were either invited by the librarian, or urged by the president, at a meeting of the entering class, to visit the library during registration week. This method was not thoroughly successful, and others were tried. The one which has so far proved most effective is that of a definite appointment for each new student with the librarian, followed immediately by a short introduction to the library and its arrangement given by a member of the staff. At this time the student is shown how to find books and how to take them out, and told of the regulations about returning them. The librarian often asks the student about her school library and about other libraries she has used. She explains that because we are a small college and have a small library, we do not have everything, and suggests that when the student expects to do an extensive piece of work she should plan ahead to be sure the library has the necessary material, and if not, so that it can, if possible, be secured. The librarian also stresses that what the library wants to do is to give individual help whenever it is needed. An assistant then shows the student how to use the catalogue, diagrams of the stacks, the stack room itself, current periodical shelves, and the reference books. If the student is interested, she is shown the location of books on the particular subjects she intends to pursue.

Any further instruction at this time seems confusing to the student. It has been found valuable, however, to present this brief and friendly introduction to the library and its policies and at this time to emphasize the fact that further individual help and instruction will be given when needed. The librarian's office is purposely near the entrance to the reading room; students are encouraged at all times to make use of the open door for consultation and assistance, and for informal conversation as well.

One of the features of the Bennington educational plan is that it stresses the development of student responsibility. This is carried out in the library by placing no limit upon the number of books any individual may borrow, by the use of a self-charging system (which

encourages an easier and simpler approach to the circulation of books), and by the absence of fines. Every library must keep accurate records of borrowers; needed overdue items must be called in;—but a simplification of obvious routine makes possible a friendly atmosphere for most of the users most of the time. It is agreeable to record that the necessity of disciplinary action, often a very great problem in secondary school and college libraries, is practically nonexistent. Since students prefer to use the library as a place to work, any small annoyance which may occur is usually taken care of by the students themselves. If a student is irresponsible or negligent in the care and prompt return of College property, the Community Council, or the librarian, or the student's counselor, handles her case as seems advisable. There is little actual loss of library books. The first inventory, which was taken at the end of the fifth year, showed a loss of only 12 volumes for the entire period.

The student after working through the material available in the library, is likely to find that for more intensive work she needs further resources. It is not possible to have all the books or magazines which may be needed for an individual student project. Even if they could be bought or secured by gift, the expense of cataloguing them, of housing them, even of keeping them in order and dusting them must be taken into consideration. When there are unusual demands the small library must endeavor to distinguish between material which will be used only for this particular project and material which, in all likelihood, will have further usefulness. Members of the faculty are asked to bear this in mind in making recommendations for purchase; the chief criteria of book selection in a selective collection must be that of use.

One method of making extra material available for students at work on special projects is through inter-library loans. This needs to be done with restraint; a welcome arrangement for a small library which cannot lend in exchange would be an annual subscription fee to be charged by libraries willing to lend books, or by the establishment of regional storage centers. (This plan may shortly be in operation in New England.) Additional opportunity for students to use not easily available material occurs in the Bennington winter field and reading period which extends approximately from Christmas to Washington's Birthday.

The winter period is designed to give students an opportunity for independent work on programs that can be more effectively carried out away from the College. Here the library has a definite function in directing students to the proper libraries, public, college, university and libraries in special fields. The librarian endeavors to make clear in advance how such libraries may be used. Letters of introduction are given to students who need to make use of the college and university libraries that can conveniently extend their facilities to visiting students; special arrangements, when feasible, are made for students who have a clear need to use libraries which find it necessary to limit free access to their collections. The New York Public Library, by reason of its geographical location, and the size and excellence of its collection, bears the greatest burden in this respect and offers whole-hearted cooperation. Bennington College students who wish to use the Reference Department of the New York Public Library are given individual cards of introduction, and as much information as possible about the use of that library before they leave for the field period.

Students have gone out in the winter to carry on many different kinds of projects. One year a student worked in the Folger Library in Washington, gathering material for her study of Shakespeare. The same year a student who was planning to be in New Orleans for the winter period, worked in the Howard Library, gathering material about the Acadians and she supplemented this by field trips into the Bayou country. Last year a student worked in the Vermont State Libraries, the Bennington Historical Museum, and the Middlebury and Dartmouth libraries, gathering material for a biography of her ancestor, one of the first governors of Vermont. Another, who lived in Hartford, saved herself many trips to Boston and New York, by working at the Connecticut University library on agricultural problems. A music student may gather material for a paper on Wagner; or an art student for a paper on Renaissance architecture. Other students may be working in the Congressional Library on different projects in American history and culture; and some work at home on such subjects as romantic poetry or post-war history using the resources of their local libraries.

A few students have had the opportunity to work in special libraries in their field of interest, for example, in the library of the

Metropolitan Museum, the Foreign Library of the Chase National Bank, the library of the New School for Social Research, the Frick Art Reference Library, the Academy of Medicine Library, the British Library of Information and the Army Medical Library in Washington.

During the student's senior year, if her project for graduation involves a thesis, the library takes an increasingly active part in helping that student. Early in the year as soon as the subjects of senior theses have been determined, candidates for graduation are requested to notify the library of the subject of their theses, so that new material as it comes in may be routed to them and also so that the library may make arrangements for supplementing gaps in the collection. The senior and her counselor often consult the library as to what material is available or possible to secure. A style sheet for senior theses, devised by the library and the faculty Student Writing Committee, is issued to each student. There is a display in the library of books and pamphlets on writing theses and making bibliographies. Students frequently consult the librarian again after the first draft of the thesis is written to see whether all available material has been used and to see whether the format is acceptable.

A typical example last year was that of a student majoring in social studies whose thesis dealt with strategic war materials. Involving, as it necessarily did, reference to the last World War, there was presented a challenging problem in the consultation of much material naturally not to be found in so new a library. At the beginning of the year the student's counselor and the student conferred with the librarian on the subject matter necessary. They went over what was available, agreed on what could legitimately be borrowed from other libraries, and what should be purchased. They also decided what the student should use elsewhere. As the term went on the student kept the librarian informed of her progress, and toward the end of the term careful plans were made for her use of metropolitan and university libraries during her winter reading period. Upon her return from the winter period, she again reported the progress she had made, and such additional material as was necessary was then secured by purchase or loan, or in the case of current government documents, by gift. The bibliography appended to the thesis was presented to the librarian for inspection before the thesis was put

into its final form. In this project the careful planning and guidance of the counselor, the patient and exhaustive aid of the librarian, the eagerness of the student to avail herself of all legitimate aid, and the frequent consultation among the student and her counselor and the librarian operated to the advantage of all concerned. The library was successfully carrying out its educational function.

After nine years of successful operation of the library at Bennington the effectiveness of its policies and practices is clear. Free access and the easy availability of material do result in an increased use of books. An informal and friendly attitude attracts students and encourages them to communicate freely with the library staff. A small collection of up-to-date basic material can be developed gradually and as need arises. Many individual titles are found to be more valuable than the same number of volumes which includes many duplicates. It has been proved desirable and possible to dispense with the large reserve collection, for the thwarting of close contacts with books does not encourage their free use.

These policies and practices represent more than practical decisions; they reflect the character of the College itself. The library's effectiveness comes, not from being well planned in general, but from being well planned for Bennington. The task of dispensing books to large numbers of students engaged in meeting uniform assignments is here replaced by a more complex service. As is apparent, the major demands come from the two chief centers of activity within the curriculum: from the basic fields of study requiring source materials both contemporary and classic, used constantly and from many different points of approach; and from independent study which the library aids actively in cultivating. In meeting these demands, the library has the further requirement of being a natural part of a small, active and intimate working community, combining the necessary disciplines with an exceptional ease of use. The librarian in this setting is an educational collaborator, exercising a tutorial as well as an administrative function. The library at Bennington, like the College, is a constantly evolving instrument of education.

LIBRARY STAFF

GLADYS YOUNG LESLIE.....	<i>Librarian</i>
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Photographs in this Bulletin are by Herta and Simon Moselsio



Consultation of dictionaries, encyclopedias and similar material is provided for in the reference alcove.



The Library now has over 21,000 books and 2,600 pamphlets.

This book is due on the date indicated below, or at the expiration of a definite period after the date of borrowing, as provided by the rules of the Library or by special arrangement with the Librarian in charge.

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